

Paradox or Paradigm? Operational Contractor Support

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CONTRACTOR SUPPORT is integral to the Army's history. Contractors provided logistical support to the fledgling Army during the Revolutionary War and, according to General George Washington, the Army's supply improved with the advent of contractor support.¹ Operational contractor support (OCS)—a relatively new term—refers to the essential logistical support contractors have provided to the U.S. Army since the founding of the Nation. At present, OCS is increasingly the rule, not the exception.

For almost a decade, the military has been shifting supply and support personnel into combat jobs and hiring defense contractors to do the rest. According to Peter W. Singer, author of *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, OCS represents "a profound change in the way the military operates."² Over the past decade, the number of contract civilians performing work the military used to do has increased tenfold.

In September 2003, the Army War College recognized the importance of OCS by including the "Impact of Civilian Contractors on the Battlefield" as one of its key strategic issues requiring further detailed analysis.³ An authoritative report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that contractors have become a critical force multiplier in many missions because of troop ceilings, unavailable host-nation support, and the operational requirement to keep military units available to respond to a major regional conflict.⁴

In the 21st-century battlespace, the Army has and will continue to deploy OCS into hostile fire areas to access the best industry can offer; apply increasingly scarce resources to principal combat systems; and keep pace with technology. The challenge is defining roles and responsibilities and finding the amalgam of OCS and force structure that produces an acceptable amount of risk. OCS functions within the context of a comprehensive approach to logis-

tics that encompasses equipment support, required services, supply support, readiness, management, training, and force protection. As such, OCS is an ever more essential element as advances in technology and weapons systems proliferate.

Existing Army doctrine divides operational support into three categories: theater, external, and system. Contractors who provide broad support services for a particular operation provide theater support and external support. System support contractors primarily sustain individual systems and equipment. These contractors perform specific and precisely defined activities and are essential to operating modern military systems. While theater and external contractors have their own sets of challenges, the rise in the numbers and importance of system support contractors has generated discussion and caused concern.

As weapons and technological systems become increasingly sophisticated and integral to operations at all levels of war, the need for technical expertise in the 21st-century battlespace has never been greater. With the introduction of increasingly sophisticated weaponry and technologically advanced systems, a revolution in military affairs assures that system support contractors will become increasingly crucial components of successful mission accomplishment.

Logistics Support Considerations

Future Army logistical support will depend on integrating OCS at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Strategic logistics encompasses determining support requirements and coordinating with the industrial base. At the operational level, logistics is the link between strategic decisions and tactical employment of OCS down to the actual unit. Consideration of contractors' roles must start at the beginning of a product or support life cycle. The Army must address the roles and responsibilities of opera-

tional contractors throughout the life cycle of a weapon or technological system. As systems become more complex and difficult to operate and maintain, a contractor presence is necessary during the procurement process, when the system is fielded, and during live training and actual deployments.

Life-cycle planning must account for OCS at each step of the process from beginning to end. Essential interrogatives include—

- What should remain military-owned and operated?
 - What should be military-owned but contractor-operated?
 - What could be contractor-owned but remain military-operated?
 - What could be contractor-owned and contractor-operated?
- To integrate OCS into planning and doctrine, the military must apply fundamental principles applicable to present contingencies as well as emerging realities. Fortner provides the following guiding parameters for planning and implementing OCS at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of support.⁵
- Contracted support must be integrated into the overall support plan.
 - Contractors do not replace force structure: they augment capabilities and provide additional options for meeting support requirements.
 - Contingency plans must ensure continuation of service if a contractor fails to perform.
 - Depending on the mission, and enemy, terrain, troops, time, and civil considerations, contractors might deploy throughout an area of operations and in virtually all conditions.
 - Commanders are legally responsible for assessing risks and protecting contractors in their area of operations.
 - Contractor-provided services should be transparent to the users: any links between Army and contractor automated systems must not place additional burdens on soldiers.
 - Contractor companies must have enough employees with appropriate skills to meet potential requirements.
 - Changing contractor activities to meet shifting operational requirements might require contract modifications.
 - The Army must be able to provide essential support before contractors arrive in theater or in the event that contractors either do not deploy or cannot continue to provide contracted services.

With these guiding principles as a planning frame-



Local contractors put the final touches on schoolhouse desks, Baba Quachar, Afghanistan, February 2003.

work, the Center for Army Lessons Learned suggests some important areas to consider when developing and implementing plans for OCS:

- Identify sufficient transportation to move OCS that deploys with the unit but does not possess transportation assets of its own.
- During training, units must replicate contractor deployments as closely as possible.
- Management of contractors and contracts should be centralized.
- Training and other deployment actions for contractors must begin early enough to ensure that all deploying contractors have time to meet necessary requirements.
- Units and contractor organizations must know about the specific theater requirements to ensure that deploying contractors can meet obligations in the area of operations.

Outsourcing and Best Practices

One of the Department of Defense's most widely adopted civilian best practices is the outsourcing of specialized logistics functions to contractors. The number of contractors and range of functions they perform creates a new, dynamic logistics support structure for the current operational environment. Operation Desert Storm and operations in Bosnia illustrate this point. During Operation Desert Storm, 1 in 50 Americans deployed were civilians. In Bosnia, that ratio increased to 1 contractor for every 10 soldiers.⁶

OCS allows military personnel to focus on their core competencies—what they do best—to successfully accomplish the mission. Experts in organizational behavior have concluded that “organizational success is determined by excellence in a small number of core competencies. Because these

competencies are so crucial, the organization must maintain a preeminent operational capability in them. *Non-core competencies are outsourced*" [emphasis added].⁷

Logistics experts have concluded that "when judiciously exercised, outsourcing heightens performance, produces a streamlined workforce, and provides the best personnel. As a rule, specialization contributes to economies of scale and helps simplify organizational structures. Proper logistic outsourcing permits the armed services to focus on their respective core competencies. In short, outsourcing frees personnel to focus on what they do best. As the 21st-century battlespace changes, so too must the logistics network."⁸

Field Manual 110-10-2, *Contracting Support on the Battlefield*, sets forth doctrine describing how the armed services should use and manage civilian contractors in the battlespace.⁹ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-53, *Combat Service Support*, specifies that "civilians . . . will provide an ever-increasing number of capabilities in support of future Army operations. Use of these support personnel will require their integration into the battle command environment and into the [combat service support] CSS framework, as well as mission training for the civilians involved."¹⁰

Contractor readiness has long been a critical consideration integral to OCS. No comprehensive system is in place to measure contractors' effects on unit readiness at the strategic, operational, or tactical levels of logistical support. At present, and for the foreseeable future, contractor readiness is becoming more, not less, critical in today's high-tempo, deployment-intensive environment. To prevent the "pick-up game" mentality of contract support, the Army must develop contractor relationships that promote readiness, training, mutual respect, and confidence, which is but one measure that can lead to a more predictable relationship when conflict arises.

"You train like you fight and you fight like you train" is an old Army adage that also applies to contractors destined for hostile-fire areas. The need for enhanced training of OCS personnel and their military counterparts is not new. Contractor personnel—as well as those in the military who plan for and are responsible for implementation—need more training. Recently, the GAO reported that oversight personnel not being trained efficiently hindered effective oversight of the U.S. military's Balkan logistics.¹¹

Personnel turbulence associated with the frequent turnover of military supervisors also severely affected the efficiency and effectiveness of contrac-

tor planning, monitoring, and supervision. The GAO report notes that "personnel assigned to contract oversight roles . . . have not been trained sufficiently, and the frequent personnel rotations . . . preclude continuity of oversight efforts."¹² The Army has made some progress in training personnel involved in OCS, but obviously, much more is needed.

While most civilians are considered noncombatants, their jobs in support of U.S. weapons systems might easily involve direct contact with hostile fire. This critical problem becomes especially difficult to solve when the threat is "nuclear, biological, or chemical. International law such as the Geneva Convention does recognize the necessity of civilians' support for combat forces but only in noncombatant roles that keep them out of a direct engagement with enemy forces. Although the world community generally recognizes an international legal precedent for civilians to provide support during war, advances in weapons systems and changes in warfighting strategies have blurred the lines between support and combat, combatant and noncombatant, and civilian and soldier."¹³ Army doctrine is only now beginning to come to terms with the many legal issues associated with OCS.

A contractor's status in a hostile-fire area is of concern, but more troubling is the ambiguity of international law concerning the status of contractors. Contracts seldom specify that civilian personnel must receive the same protection as military personnel, which is a significant legal loophole, especially in the complex management environment in which military commanders operate. Two questions arise:

- What legal obligation does the Army have to protect its contractors?

- Should civilian contractors receive the same kind of physical protection in the battlespace as military CSS forces?

The Army does not command and control contractors in the way it commands and controls military units and soldiers. The Army manages contractors. The management mechanism is the contract itself, which presents leadership and management challenges. A contractor is obligated to perform only that which is specified in the contract. Leaders who want to make changes to the contract must coordinate them through the contracting officer. Observers have noted that "managing civilian logistics support comprises two issues. The first is identifying those activities that are appropriate for privatization or civilian outsourcing. The second focuses on the administrative decisions and policies required to implement logistics outsourcing. The latter involves

more complicated tasks, ranging from contract design to performance monitoring and process redesign. Both issues involve critical decisions that impact the military-civilian logistics interface.”¹⁴ Managing contractors involves extensive planning and foresight.

Food for Thought

OCS in the 21st-century battlespace is not without complexities. A host of questions need to be asked—and answered—if OCS is to become an integral part of the Army’s operational scheme. With that in mind, I offer the following as food for thought.

Responsibility. In the Army, who is responsible for OCS oversight of policies, procedures, and execution? Should a single organization be responsible for all of it? Is this a possible expanded role for the G4 at the Department of Army headquarters?

Readiness. Given that OCS is an essential component of logistics in the 21st-century battlespace and, therefore, directly contributes to readiness, why is there no established procedure or system to assess contractors’ readiness status or determine how they affect unit readiness by being there or, more important, by not being there?

Training and doctrine. Can we and should we do more with training and doctrine? Recognizing the indispensability of OCS in the 21st-century battlespace, should we develop a comprehensive approach to OCS training and doctrine and begin to make OCS a real member of the Army Team?

Planning and integration. If the Army out-sources more combat and combat service support, as suggested by former Army Vice Chief of



Contractors and an MP secure the lid of a radioactive chemical container, Habbiniyah NBC Barracks, Iraq, November 2003.

Staff General John M. Keane, should we consider planning for and integrating OCS into current and emerging organizations?

How Best to Achieve OCS Support

In these resource-constrained times, it is axiomatic that the Army will increasingly be required to assume tasks with insufficient resources. Logisticians now find themselves increasingly concerned with the bottom line—how best to achieve logistical support at the lowest possible cost while meeting all demands and operational requirements.

The Army must rely ever-increasingly on OCS to accomplish missions at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. OCS and Army personnel are complementary, not antithetical. The modern paradigm, therefore, is not either contractors or service personnel but both contractors *and* service personnel operating together in a well-planned, integrated logistics system. **MR**

NOTES

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